Carmen's Good Deed for the Day

By T. Morris Fraser

Carmen was probably the most intelligent dog we ever had in the kennels. She certainly was the most beautiful. An Afghan hound, with the long legs and blonde hair of arguably that most beautiful breed of dogs, she looked like if she had been human she would have been a runway model. But it wasn't merely her beauty that was so compelling. It was her eyes, deep dark eyes that blazed with intelligence. She looked at you as though to say: 'O.K. You're the boss just now. But you just wait and see!' And we didn't have long to wait.

She was brought in one day by her vacationing owners who wanted to leave her with us for a couple of weeks. We'd never had an Afghan before and were delighted, the more so when she complacently walked in to her kennel and sat down without a fuss. The kennels were housed in a long low building, a hundred yards of so from the old stone farmhouse that had become our home. There were fifteen kennels in a row, fronted inside the building by an access corridor. A door, comprising a steel frame faced with heavy wire mesh, led from the corridor to each kennel, and a flap door at the back of each kennel led to an individual outside runway for each. The door was locked with a simple latch that could be operated with one finger. At the near end of the corridor were the administrative office and the food preparation room which had a window to the outside.

But that's enough for the setup. Everything was fine for the first day or so. She was always pleased to see us, cooperative in every way, got along with the other dogs when she went out to her back runway where she could see them all, as well as the lovely countryside around. But she would still look at you with those strange and compelling eyes. And then one morning, as we walked up to the kennels to take care of the chores, we were somewhat surprised, but not dismayed, to see a beautiful blonde head poking out of the window with a paw on each side of it, all belonging to a very recognisable Afghan hound.

'What's going on?' I said in amazement. 'How did she do that? We must have left the kennel door open! But how did she open the window? It doesn't open!'

We switched our ambling gait into a run and dashed up to the kennel, and into the preparation room. Carmen took her head from the window, turned, with her paws still on the sill, and wagged her tail. Except there wasn't a window sill. She had removed the window, frame and all, from the wall. We were amazed and aghast, but what could you do. I put the leash on her and again with no fuss she went happily back to her kennel. I cursed myself for having left it open.

We replaced the window with the help of a carpenter, and all went well for a day or two. Carmen was very cooperative in every way, but she still looked at you with those strange eyes. I was wary of them now, but didn't know what else to expect. I should have expected more..

It was some days later, however, when we heard the cacophony of noise coming from the kennel. We had a dozen or more dogs in that day, and it seemed like they were all barking at once. So once again we dashed up to see what had happened. Carmen met us at the door, tail wagging appreciatively. We walked through the office into the corridor. Every kennel door was open and the dogs were running up and down the corridor barking madly in appreciation of the best time they had had since coming to the kennels.

In a spirit of good will, Carmen had opened each door.

We were very glad when her owners came to claim her, and as she left she turned to us and said with those expressive eyes: 'I told you!'